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SUBJECT: NAGA INSURGENTS SEEK UNITY PRIOR TO NAGALAND STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

REF: KOLKATA 0377

¶1. (SBU) Summary. December 3-7, ConGen and Embassy New Delhi PolCouns visited Nagaland and discussed with officials and contacts the Naga insurgencies and preparations for the February 2008 state assembly elections. While many decried the internecine violence among the insurgent factions, most contacts, even senior government officials such as Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, supported the insurgents' goal of autonomy for a greater Nagaland, incorporating Nagas from other Indian states and even in Burma. However, views were split on the possible results of the impending state assembly election. Naturally, CM Rio expressed confidence that his Naga Freedom Party (NFP)-led Democratic Alliance of Nagaland (DAN) coalition aligned to the national opposition National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would return to power. However, Rio has experienced many defections, with cabinet ministers resigning to join the state opposition Congress Party. Rio's Congress opposition believes that, with a Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) as the national government, the state opposition will be able to defeat the Rio's NDA coalition. End Summary.

Naga Insurgency

¶2. (U) When India became independent in 1947, the Nagas (then inhabitants of the Naga Hills in undivided Assam) were unwilling to be part of the new republic, considering themselves distinct from Indians, and launched an armed struggle for a sovereign Naga homeland. The Naga community consists of 17 major tribes and at least 20 sub-tribes. They inhabit primarily the present state of Nagaland, and areas in Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Burma. U.S. missionaries' conversion of the Nagas and missionary school education weakened the exclusive clan allegiance of the sub-tribes and fostered the growth of a pan-Naga consciousness. The GOI's creation of a Nagaland state in 1963 failed to contain militancy and the Naga insurgency has resulted in 20,000 deaths in Nagaland since India's independence.

¶3. (SBU) The Naga National Council (NNC) under Angami Zapu Phizo initially led the early revolt against the GOI. General Secretary of the Naga Hoho (the governing tribal body) Neingulo

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Krome and other Naga contacts told ConGen that Naga insurgents received training from China and Pakistan in the 1960s and 1970s, with some insurgents trekking across Burma to reach southwest China. In 1975 NNC moderates accepted the Indian Constitution following the Shillong Accord with New Delhi. However, NNC radicals subsequently formed the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) in 1980 demanding a greater Nagaland encompassing all Naga inhabited areas in India's northeast. NSCN split in 1988 with one faction under Isak Chisi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah and the other led by S. Khaplang. The NSCN (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) emerged as the more powerful of the two factions. A cease-fire was initiated between GOI and NSCN-IM in 1997, but negotiations have not progressed significantly. In April 2000 the NSCN-Khaplang (NSCN-K) declared a cease-fire, but no productive talks have resulted.

¶4. (SBU) The larger NSCN-IM operates primarily in Nagaland, Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. NSCN-K is more limited to Burma and parts of Nagaland. The NSCN-IM's objective is to establish Greater Nagaland (Nagalim) consisting of all Naga inhabited areas in Northeast India. The outfit has links in Burma, Bangladesh, Thailand and the Netherlands. General Secretary Thuingaleng Muivah and Chairman Isak Chisi Swu are

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negotiating for a peace settlement with GOI, and have virtually given up the demand for sovereignty. During the previous Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led NDA national government, the GOI acknowledged the "unique history" of the Nagas, something that Nagas interpreted as a positive direction in the negotiations. But with a Congress government in New Delhi since May 2004, the peace negotiations appear to be deadlocked. While the GOI is believed to have unofficially agreed to the insurgents' demand for greater autonomy in all departments, barring currency, external affairs, communication and defense, the NSCN-IM leadership is unwilling to compromise on inclusion of Naga inhabited areas in neighboring states of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh into a greater Nagaland. New Delhi has made it clear that it is not in favor of creating unrest and

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resentment in other Northeast states simply to appease Nagas.

Efforts at Naga Unity

¶5. (SBU) During the time of ConGen and PolCouns' visit, Naga Hoho representatives and individuals from the insurgent groups were attempting to create a consensus among the independence factions. On December 3 some NSCN-IM and NSCN-K members formed an NSCN (Unity) faction. Speaking to ConGen, Naga Hoho General Secretary Krome initially dismissed the new unity group as being

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primarily from the Sumi Naga tribe and not representing a broad cross section of the dominant tribes such as the Angami, Ao, Lotha and others. However on December 14, the Naga Hoho issued a statement in support of the unity efforts and on December 17, the NSCN-IM, NSCN-K and the NNC agreed to a six-month cease fire agreement.

¶6. (SBU) The recent unity efforts have reduced the internecine factional fighting that had been increasing in the run-up to the state assembly elections scheduled for February 2008. The Institute for Conflict Management's provisional data for 2007 indicates that of the 108 people killed by insurgency violence, 88 deaths were from intra-factional insurgent fighting. The NSCN-IM is closely linked with CM Rio, his Naga People's Front (NPF) and the NDA and the NSCN-K is linked with the state Congress Party. The political parties use the Naga factions to support candidates in the constituencies by intimidating voters and extorting funds. The South Asia Intelligence Review (SAIR) reported in December that the Naga insurgents operate "unhindered in the townships and country-side, enforcing their groups' diktats across Nagaland. Intelligence reports indicate

that the cadre strength of the NSCN-IM has increased from 800 to about 2,500 since the July 1997 cease-fire announcement. The outfit's well-oiled 'finance department' engages in wide-spread 'tax-collection' activities and its 'home department' virtually runs the State administration. Its 'crime suppression department' ensures control of its areas of dominance, administering a selective 'justice' over various 'offences.'" In November, Congress party official, former Nagaland Chief Minister and present Goa Governor S. C. Jamir alleged he was ambushed by the NSCN-IM while visiting Nagaland. Although unhurt in the attack, Jamir claimed that he was targeted by the NSCN-IM because of his Congress affiliation. As Goa Governor, Jamir could not officially campaign; however, many contacts believed that Jamir was in Nagaland to prepare for the state assembly election.

State Assembly Elections

¶17. (SBU) In his conversation with ConGen and PolCouns, CM Rio expressed confidence that his NFP-led DAN coalition would retain power in the February 2008 state assembly elections. However, his government has seen a number of departures and defections to the opposition Congress party. In November, Minister for Roads and Bridges, and Works and Housing Tokheho Yepthomi resigned from the DAN council of ministers and two Independent MLAs -- P. Chuba Chang and Jongshilemba -- withdrew their support to the DAN government and also resigned as Parliamentary Secretaries. Possibly reflecting Rio's efforts to compensate for his weakened position, he has sought to reach out to the NSCN-K faction. On December 2, the CM asked the GOI to pressure the Burmese junta to grant autonomous status to the Naga tribes in Burma. The NSCN-K faction's greatest support is among the four Naga tribes and 49 clans located between the northern Chindwin and the Indo-Burma border. However, senior state Congress Party leader ¶18. Imkong was equally confident in his conversation with PolCouns that Congress would form a coalition government in the next state elections. Other contacts were split as to the possible election results in February. Many noted that Rio's support has diminished and that Congress has an advantage with the backing of the Congress-ruling national government, but the contacts were not certain that Congress would necessarily win enough votes to form a new government.

¶18. (SBU) Comment: Recent efforts by Naga insurgents to stop factional fighting may will reduce violence prior to the state

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assembly elections in 2008. However, the insurgents continue to maintain excessive influence in the Nagaland, running shadow governments in the areas under their control. What may have started as a political movement for Naga independence has devolved into something more akin to organized crime supported by extortion and intimidation. The local political parties' willingness to align themselves with the insurgents and to use them for their political ends means that no effective efforts are being taken to reduce the insurgents' grip on Nagaland. The GOI sees Nagaland as remote and of limited economic or political significance and so is willing to let the lawlessness fester, anticipating that the profiteering will corrode the desire for Naga independence. End Comment.

¶19. (U) Reftel reports on HIV/AIDS in Nagaland. This message was coordinated with AmEmbassy New Delhi.
JARDINE